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Commissioner Ekern (left) with Gov. Kaine

Getting to know the new commissioner

David S. Ekern, P.E., is excited about helping shape the agency into a model for 21st century DOTs. A long-term transportation professional, he also is the son of a chief engineer in his home state. His last assignment was as director of the Idaho DOT. He is thoughtful and inquisitive, and he arrives at VDOT with respect for its reputation and accomplishments. **Read more...**

Top Stories

- **Operating VDOT like a business: viewing the plan.**
- **VDOT appraiser escaped communism to become immersed in Northern Virginia real estate.**
- **New VDOT Web site active on Nov. 4.**
- **Roundabouts are safer, more efficient than traffic signals, in some cases, say engineers.**
- **Equipment technicians and construction inspectors have data at their fingertips with laptops.**
- **Their careers and the interstate system began together—50 years ago.**



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About this Bulletin

Good morning VDOT team,

We're in a new era, and we have a new commissioner.

This edition offers you a chance to get to know our leader, David S. Ekern, P.E. The lead story is about his achievements, style and background (his father was chief engineer at MnDOT). Also, in the commissioner's column, you'll get a sense of who he is and where he thinks we're heading in the 21st century.

Click on the home page for those features and others, including:

- Special Report: VDOT's Business Plan in digestible form (running the agency like a business, good info for all of us).
- Virtual Visit: takes you to the Great Dismal Swamp where VDOT has built "critter crossings."
- VDOTer-in-Profile: Steve Kisska made a dramatic escape from communism just before being sent to a work camp. He works now in the Northern Virginia District Right of Way office.
- Answer File: Which four VDOT veterans began their VDOT careers in 1956, the same year the interstate system construction began?

There's much more.

Happy reading,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck".

Chuck Armstrong, Editor

The Bulletin is published bi-monthly, online for active employees and in print for retirees.

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David Ekern takes VDOT's top post

VDOT's new commissioner is a licensed engineer, a second-generation transportation professional and a career DOTman who has worked his way up from engineer trainee to be the leader of one of the nation's top DOTs. He's naturally inquisitive, a quick study, thoughtful and excited about leading a DOT considered a forerunner in a new era.



David S. Ekern, P.E., hit the ground running after Gov. Tim Kaine appointed him Virginia's 16th transportation commissioner Sept. 8. While new commissioners usually begin with an executive briefing on the agency they're about to run, Ekern was handed a transition notebook, teamed up with new Chief Deputy Commissioner Greg Whirley, and filled in on the agency as he shuttled from one meeting to the next. Little did he know that when vacationing in Hawaii, he would get a phone call from Gov. Kaine asking him to come to Virginia-and that a few days later he would be in the media spotlight as he began to lead VDOT into the future.

Ekern learned first hand in his initial days with VDOT that this was not a behind-the-scenes desk job. His first week was a blur of Commonwealth Transportation Board meetings, presentations and project visits in Norfolk, and the second week sent him right into the arena of the special session of the General Assembly. He was introduced to lawmakers as the transportation point man while they hammered away at transportation legislation. In between were visits to Hampton Roads, Lynchburg, Richmond, Fredericksburg and Salem districts.

But he's a quick study, and he knew a lot about VDOT before arriving. "VDOT has a national reputation as one of the best DOTs in the country," he said.

And he should know. Before joining the Idaho Department of Transportation as its director, he went as a loaned executive to AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) where he learned what most DOTs across the nation were doing, and about transportation on an international level. "VDOT always was on the forefront," he noted.

Ekern, who is believed to be VDOT's first commissioner with a professional engineering license, advised his executive team last week that he is a nontraditional engineer. As a young man, he strongly considered going into the ministry before he chose engineering. Then, in his sophomore year in college, he interviewed several civil engineers at Minnesota DOT and saw how exciting engineering was. He has a love and compassion for people, he said, and this will be reflected in his work.

Ekern grew up in a Norwegian Minnesota family. His father worked 45 years at the Minnesota DOT (MnDOT) and eventually became chief engineer. Transportation was naturally in his blood. After college, David Ekern began his career at MnDOT.

He worked on survey crews, as a project manager, in maintenance operations, planning, engineering and environmental. In the 1970s, when the National Environmental Protection Act passed, he wrote environmental impact statements and interfaced with citizens. "I had about 10 years of dealing with controversy and angry people," he remembers. Later he moved up to maintenance engineer, district engineer and director of engineering services.

After 33 years at MnDOT, he left the department and his position as assistant commissioner to work at AASHTO, and then to become director of the Idaho DOT. He developed the largest transportation improvement program in the history of Idaho. Slightly more than three years later, he is at VDOT, facing a new challenging assignment.

The commissioner told his executive team in a meeting last week not to be surprised if he doesn't respond immediately to what they're saying. It's his way to think about information and consider it, he said. But he welcomes new ideas and concepts--especially about efficiency in and modernization of transportation systems.

"I ask a lot of questions," he told them, "but don't interpret this as having a hidden agenda. I'm naturally inquisitive."

When Ekern accepted his new job, he said the governor's simple instructions were to "continue the journey." As the governor announced Ekern's appointment, he described him as "a recognized national leader in transportation operations, management, context sensitive design and innovative program delivery for the 21st century. He has the vision and leadership to take VDOT to the next level--with a focus on performance, accountability, innovation, and smarter integration of transportation and land-use planning."

The commissioner offered these thoughts recently on how he envisions the work VDOT does. "Transportation touches everyone in Virginia every day. With our work, we need to focus on the product, not the process, and we need to be entrepreneurial in the way we do business. The transportation business is not just about building roads. When we create a new product, we have to ask ourselves, does it serve the public? Does it reflect our commitment to protecting the environment? Does it fit into our on-time and on-budget performance measures? And does it ensure that we are using our taxpayers' money wisely to serve our customers?"

Although he's been on the job only a short time, it's obvious the commissioner is excited about joining an organization that is charting a course and creating a model DOT for the 21st century.

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Special Report**Operating VDOT like a Business**

How do you turn Virginia's third-largest government agency into a business-minded organization? It all starts with a plan.

Since last spring, VDOT executive management under the leadership of Acting Commissioner (now Chief Deputy Commissioner) Greg Whirley has worked with leaders from around the state to grapple with how to turn the VDOT of the past, an organization of engineers and construction crews geared toward building Virginia's roads, into the VDOT of tomorrow, an organization of project and contract managers who operate a state-of-the-art transportation system.

VDOT is an agency steeped in tradition. VDOT created the transportation network. We rolled up our sleeves and got dirty to make the highways, bridges and infrastructure that we see today. With the changing business environment, the explosion of technology, and the ever-increasing expectations of our customers, we cannot do it alone anymore. In the future VDOT will:

- " oversee private construction firms as they build new roads;
- " manage contracts for those who perform highway maintenance; and
- " be the project managers, not the project doers.

VDOT is required by law to present a business plan each year to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). The 2007 VDOT Business Plan was presented to the CTB Sept. 21 at its meeting in Norfolk. The plan shows how VDOT is redefining its core business to include innovations in Systems Operations, developing strategies for increased efficiency and outlining VDOT's vision for continued improvement.

Legislation requires 100 percent of interstate maintenance to be outsourced to private industry by July 1, 2009. The VDOT workforce continues to shrink due to demands for smaller government. And, VDOT is looking at greater efficiency through possibly closing area headquarters that are no longer needed as the agency's size decreases and our workload changes.

"With the new business plan, VDOT is leading the change and taking a proactive approach to its future," said Whirley. "This is a new VDOT and we are going to learn to operate differently than we have in the past. This business plan will help us to do that."

VDOT's new commissioner, David S. Ekern, P.E., was introduced to the business plan on his first days in Virginia. "I have reviewed the plan and I think it is a strong one," he told the agency leaders. "This shows again how VDOT is looking forward to the future and finding better ways to deliver a nationally recognized transportation program."

District administrators, division heads and other leaders throughout the agency have met with their employees. The message has been consistent. The business of VDOT is changing, and the business plan is the roadmap for VDOT's new role in the commonwealth.--**Jeff Caldwell**

To view the VDOT business plan presentation given to the CTB, visit <http://www.virginiadot.org/infoservice/vdot-welcome.asp>.

View concise summary of business plan.

Building a Case for Change

There are multiple reasons to change the way VDOT operates.

- Our revenue is not keeping pace with inflation associated with road construction and maintenance costs.
- VDOT has options--either lead the change or let someone else map the change for us. VDOT is choosing to proactively lead the change to make the organization stronger and more efficient.
- Citizens and public officials continue to demand smaller government.
- Public expectations are rising for a better transportation system, reduced congestion, improved facilities and improved convenience.



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News Briefs

Highway, rail changes studied for I-81

Rail improvements, truck climbing lanes, longer on- and off-ramps at interchanges and greater use of technology to manage traffic are part of a comprehensive I-81 improvement strategy now under consideration by the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB).

Members heard presentations on the I-81 Corridor Improvement Study, planned safety and operational improvements and the I-81 Freight Rail Study during their September meeting.

Results from the I-81 Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement and significant public involvement activities indicate that future traffic estimates for the numbers of cars and trucks on I-81 do not support building a separate roadway for trucks along the entire length of the corridor. However, nearly all of the I-81 corridor will need additional capacity by 2035. Read more: <http://www.virginiadot.org/infoservice/news/newsrelease.asp?ID=CO-0651>

Safety rest area contracts awarded

The CTB awarded \$10 million in contracts at its September meeting to reconstruct two Virginia interstate safety rest areas, one on I-95 south near Fredericksburg and the other on I-64 west in New Kent County.

The new safety rest areas will have additional restrooms as well as improvements to the grounds and parking areas. The new facilities also will include innovative energy and water conservation systems to reduce maintenance and utility costs. The new I-95 area is slated for completion in July 2007 and the new I-64 center in June 2007. Both of the old areas are closed for reconstruction.

The projects are part of a \$20 million statewide improvement program to renovate 11 Virginia safety rest areas and to reconstruct three safety rest area and welcome center locations. To view a listing of all 41 Virginia safety rest areas and welcome centers and to see which are part of this improvement program, see: <http://www.virginiadot.org/comtravel/map-rest-area.asp>.

Board hears Route 460 proposals

Three conceptual proposals to develop and operate a new Route 460 between Petersburg and Suffolk under the Public-Private Transportation Act were presented to the CTB its September workshop.

The proposed 55-mile, four-lane divided highway would be built south of the existing road from I-295 in Prince George County to Route 58 in Suffolk. It would include nine interchanges at towns and major secondary roads. The proposals have preliminary toll rates ranging from 7 to 24 cents per mile.

An independent review panel, to be appointed by the secretary of transportation, will solicit significant public participation as the panel reviews the proposals. A recommendation from the panel is expected next spring. Read more: <http://www.virginiadot.org/infoservice/news/newsrelease.asp?ID=CO-0649>

Safe school routes program launched

A "Safe Routes to School" program, begun this fall, creates additional opportunities for Virginia children in grades K-8 to walk or bike to school safely. The program will "enhance the quality of life in communities across Virginia," Gov. Tim Kaine commented as he launched the program.

With \$13 million in federal funds, VDOT will administer grants for the program with the assistance of a statewide advisory panel. Mini-grants of \$5,000 will be available for the development of bicycle and pedestrian plans and project grants of up to \$500,000 will be available for improvements such as improved crosswalk signalization, sidewalk extensions and trail connections. Read more:

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/MediaRelations/newsReleases/viewRelease.cfm?id=242>



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Halloway leads Tazewell Residency

Marty R. Halloway, P.E., has been named Tazewell Residency administrator, replacing Brenda Waters who has been serving as acting administrator since the retirement of former administrator Frank Phipps in April. Halloway will oversee transportation activities on 600 miles of roadway in Bland and Tazewell counties and will supervise 92 employees.

Halloway began his transportation career in 1999 as a construction project inspector for VDOT's Abingdon Residency. In 2001, Halloway began VDOT's Associate Engineering Program. He took the position as Tazewell assistant residency administrator in January 2002.

A Russell County native, Halloway holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the University of Virginia at Wise and a master's degree in engineering from Old Dominion University.



Halloway

Thacker is maintenance engineer

Milton Thacker, who has been Louisa Residency administrator since 2004, has been promoted to district maintenance engineer for Culpeper District.

Thacker began his career in 1969 as an inspector trainee on the construction of I-64 in Louisa County. He later became superintendent of the Cuckoo Area Headquarters, a position he held for 12 years. Subsequently, he was assigned for four years to the Culpeper District office assisting with the maintenance program. Next he served as assistant resident engineer in Warrenton for seven years and in the same position in Appomattox for three years.



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New on the Web

Weaving a More Accessible Web

For most Web surfers, the design of a Web site is an important consideration. Do I like it? Are things easy to find? Would I come back? For Web users with a disability, a site's design can prevent them from getting the information they need. Some site design can even aggravate a physical disability.

That's one of the reasons VDOT and most Virginia state agencies are in the process of a comprehensive Web redesign. The idea is to ensure that Web pages are built so they can be used by everyone.

This means building pages so that screen reader programs can turn text and other items into speech for the visually impaired. Proper design also makes sure that users with certain disabilities such as epilepsy are not physically harmed by flashing icons or scrolling lists that can cause seizures.

Last November, the Virginia Information Technologies Agency issued guidelines requiring almost all executive branch Web sites to comply with federal 508 accessibility standards. At the same time, the governor's office issued standards requiring state agencies to make their sites incorporate certain operation and design features. The goal is to give users a similar experience on state government sites and unify the Web image of the commonwealth.

The VDOT Public Affairs Web staff has been working to convert more than 9,000 pages to meet the accessibility and design standards. The project has meant rebuilding the pages from the inside out and reorganizing VDOT's site content to reflect the new design.

"It's kind of like repotting plants, but having to put your existing prize flowers into different shaped gardens with a new type of soil," said Wayne Scarberry, VDOT's Web content manager. "We have to examine how all of these pages were constructed and alter the Web code, while at the same time keeping focused on how the user can best find information on the site."

[+] Click thumbnail below to enlarge



Work has been under way for months. Representatives from various divisions and districts have been pitching in and convert the content to the new design.

The new site will be active Nov. 4. Users are encouraged to view the new VirginiaDOT.org after that date and help the Web team to continue to improve the site following its launch.

CTB launches new Web site

The Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) has a new Web site. It presents information on CTB members, meeting schedules, agendas and much more.

Audio and video clips are provided from the board's workshops and monthly meetings. In addition, materials on project updates, transportation studies and other reports are provided.

Information on "Hot Topics" and "Major Projects" is supplemented with guidelines for public comment and CTB policies. Links to agencies under the transportation secretariat also are included.

Visit the CTB site at **www.ctb.virginia.gov**



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After escaping communism

'Show us your papers' has different meaning for highly accredited VDOT realty appraiser

When Steve Kisska escaped through the Iron Curtain, he had no "papers" to prove his purpose or his existence to American soldiers who met him or to CIA agents who interrogated him.

Now, after working for decades in Northern Virginia real estate, Kisska's credentials are impeccable in his field. He holds an MAI designation from the Appraisal Institute, which is awarded only to the most experienced real estate appraisers.

When Kisska, an appraiser in Northern Virginia District's Right of Way Section, looks to the past, he remembers the exhilaration of escaping from communism. When he looks ahead, he foresees the excitement of the metro Washington real estate market roaring into the future--but with some serious implications for VDOT.

VDOTer-in-Profile: Steve Kisska, Northern Virginia District appraiser

Kisska was 20 years old in 1951 when he made his break for freedom. As a university student in Slovakia, he was being watched constantly by government agents. His father had been labeled a "former capitalist" by the communists, and that in effect meant "a death sentence" for any member of the family. His brother had escaped from a political prison a year earlier, and Kisska knew he would soon be expelled from the university and sent to a labor camp.

On a drizzling November evening, Kisska and two other young men slipped into the frigid waters of the Morava River, the border between Austria and Slovakia. Their hope was to make it to the American sector in Austria.

Russian soldiers occupied both sides of the river with search lights and machine guns. Fortunately, the lights were timed to come on later in the evening, and the overcast sky gave the escapees some cover. Unfortunately, the river was flooding after three days of rain, and the water was so cold it panicked one of the other men whom Kisska had to save as he swam. Then hypothermia took hold of Kisska's body--even after two months of cold showers to toughen up. He was paralyzed.



Steve Kisska sees another round of even greater land development coming in Northern Virginia.

"I knew there was a ford somewhere in the river, and I breathed deeply and prepared to submerge and bounce back up to the surface. But when I went down, I hit the bottom with the water only at chin level," Kisska recalls. They reached the shore, but the Russians, informed that people were escaping, arrived with a dog, almost brushing against the men in the undergrowth, but not finding them.

That was only the beginning of a thrilling-chilling escape over two days that had them hiding, running, waiting and finally shouting "CIA" when they saw some American GIs. After two months with the CIA, Kisska got a trip to Canada and freedom.

After graduation from the University of British Columbia, Kisska immigrated to Washington, D.C. He got into real estate, built upscale houses in McLean, managed properties and then went into appraising. One of his first and long-time clients was VDOT, for which he did 120 commercial appraisals, with only three contested in court. Two and a half years ago, he became a VDOT appraiser.

Kisska has watched the Northern Virginia market for a long time, and he says there is now more office space in metro Washington than in all of New York City. Nevertheless, he adds, if you think real estate has boomed in the past, just wait: The future will bring more firms that need to be near the nation's seat of power. "The big-time builders and investors--the largest--are coming," he says.

Consequently, he sees VDOT and commercial developers facing excessive prices for properties acquired as well as for damages claimed by owners affected by new developments or VDOT projects. Kisska recommends more training for VDOT right of way staff who testify against property owners' highly certified experts in court cases litigated against VDOT. He contributes to the cause by teaching a monthly lunchtime session for VDOT's younger appraisers. And he has bought out of his own pocket a year's subscription to a real estate publication for his section.

What's the next exciting thing in Kisska's life? He is traveling in Slovakia and Austria to retrace his escape 55 years ago, which raises the question: Will he re-swim the Morava River?

--By Chuck Armstrong



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Virtual Visit

'Critter crossing' Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists

Photos by Jack Beilhart

Motorist and animal safety is a continuing concern for VDOT. With approximately one deer for every seven vehicles in Virginia, collisions between them occur too frequently.

To decrease these crashes, VDOT has constructed several underpasses so animals can cross under--instead of over--highways. These "critter crossings" provide animals a way to avoid running a gauntlet of cars and trucks.

This Virtual Visit features a crossing under the recently completed Route 17, which extends south from I-64 alongside the Great Dismal Swamp to the North Carolina line. The area is a refuge for a variety of wildlife. You will see some in this feature.

Begin your visit >



This presentation requires the Adobe Flash Player.
Click the icon above to download.



'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Animals crossing over highways create great hazards for motorists.

VDOT is now considering animal crossings under the highways when practical.

Here is the new Route 17 adjacent to the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Nearby is an underpass built for the swamp's animal inhabitants.



'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



The animal crossing is under these 984-foot twin bridges on Route 17.

The bridges are built over environmentally sensitive wetlands adjoining the swamp.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Animals approach the underpass through thick vegetation.

Hundreds of edible trees, shrubs and berry bushes delectable to wildlife have been planted near the crossing to draw animals into it.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Samantha Porter, a biology major at Virginia Wesleyan College, monitors the animal crossing with these cameras.

Because animals move mostly at night, the cameras use infrared technology.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Samantha Porter downloads animal images onto her computer.

She sits on the crossing, which is higher than wetlands around it and mulch-covered.

That makes it enticing for animals traveling under the bridges.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Deer are the most frequent travelers through the animal crossing.

This is one of the infrared nighttime photos taken under the Route 17 bridge.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Bobcats also use the crossing.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



A heron makes its way — safely — under Route 17.



Back ◀ ▶ *Next*

'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Raccoons are frequent travelers on the VDOT critter crossing.

So far, the cameras have not captured black bears, but the swamp has one of the largest populations on the East Coast.

Four black bears were killed on the old Route 17 last year.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Miles of fencing prevents animals from crossing the highway and channels them toward the crossing under Route 17.

Even with this extra help from VDOT, it takes animals a while to learn to use crossings built for them.



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'Critter crossing'

Route 17 underpass serves animals and motorists



Bridget Donaldson, a scientist with the Virginia Transportation Research Council, has studied animal use of the underpass since the bridges were completed last November.

"The crossing has been successful in providing safe passage for a variety of common wildlife species," she said.



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All in the Family

Technicians of the Year



VDOT district equipment technicians of the year were recognized at the recent Annual Equipment Repair Supervisors' Workshop. They are (first row, from left) Winfield W. Tally, Fredericksburg District; Duane R. Leonard, Salem District; Travis T. Mays, Northern Virginia District; (second row) Steven D. O'Neill, Staunton District; Timmy D. Compton, Bristol District; and Grahame E. McLaughlin, Lynchburg District. Not pictured are Ronnie Overby, Richmond District, and W. Lawrence Sligh, Jr., Hampton Roads District.



Tommy Compton was named VDOT Statewide Technician and also Association of Equipment Management Professionals' National Technician of the Year, as well as Bristol District Technician of the Year. The awards are presented by Chief Deputy Commissioner Greg Whirley.

Career Moves...

Lee Coleman: from engineering technician III to engineer, Bridge Section, Bristol District.

Toni Curtis: from policy and planning specialist to assistant maintenance engineer, Fredericksburg District.

Barney Deel: from transportation operator II to transportation operator III, Freemont AHQ, Wise Residency.

George Gardner: from Management Services Division to statewide partnering coordinator in the Scheduling and Contracts Division, Central Office.

Billie Harmon: from administrative and office specialist III to office manager, Equipment Section, Bristol District.

Ronald Lawson: from transportation operator II to transportation operator III, Coeburn AHQ, Wise Residency.
Thomas Payne: from Montpelier AHQ in Ashland Residency to Keene AHQ in Charlottesville Residency as superintendent.
Jan Pearce: from human resources analyst to human resources manager, Culpeper District.
Pamela Sprouse: from procurement officer to procurement manager, Staunton District.
Pamela Turner: from hourly administrative and office specialist III to procurement officer I, Procurement Section, Staunton District.
Barry Vaughn: from transportation operator II, Dublin AHQ, Wytheville Residency, to office specialist III, Wytheville AHQ.
Dennis Williams: from contract administrator to construction manager, Fredericksburg Residency.
Roger Williams: from Ashland Residency to Sandston Residency as the new shop manager.
Richard Wright: from Sandston Residency to Ashland Residency as shop mechanic.

Professional Notes...

Tim Butler, assistant program manager for the Appraisal Section, Right of Way and Utilities Division, has been chosen from 43 candidates across the country to serve as an associate member of the National Board of Directors of the Appraisal Institute. This will be his second term in that position. The Appraisal Institute is an international association of professional real estate appraisers.

Lorraine Davis, appraisal reviewer, Right of Way Section, Staunton District, has earned a master's degree in transportation from George Mason University. In addition, she was awarded the Malcolm P. McLean Award for exceptional ability, involvement and promise in the field of transportation. She receives \$15,000 for two years of participation in the Eno Transportation Foundation Leadership Development Foundation.

Mike Delvecchio, engineer technician III, Location and Design Section, Richmond District, received a "Triple Crown" award for his work to complete a project at Ft. Lee on time, on budget and with a high Construction Quality Improvement (CQIP) score. The project included a double left-turn lane and signal modifications on Route 36 at Sisiky Gate.

Tom Jewel, public affairs specialist, was awarded a master's degree in business administration from Virginia Commonwealth University where he was a Dean's Scholar.

Blair Kinker, recently retired from the Asset Management Division, has received an honorary Automotive Service Excellence "Blue Seal of Excellence" for his lifetime contributions to technician knowledge and skills. He also received a lifetime membership in the North American Transportation Management Institute as a certified director of maintenance.

Taya Moss, community outreach specialist, Richmond District, earned a professional certification in general management and public relations from the University of Maryland.

Brad Price, land development engineer, Verona Residency, was honored by the Virginia Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers for his support of the engineering profession through service in several positions with the Virginia Section over a 10-year period.

Larry Seal, engineering technician III, and his wife, Dorothy, were awarded first place in the municipal category of the Keep Virginia Beautiful awards for their landscaping of the Edinburg Residency office property.

Sande Snead, public affairs officer, Central Office, received two national writing awards from the National Federated Press Women for VDOT projects. She won a first-place award for a press release "Study shows animals do use underpass structures to get to other side of road" and a second-place award for "Spanning Centuries: Restoring a Boomtown Bridge" press kit. She has also been named president of the Virginia Press Women statewide organization for 2006-8.

Matt Swanson, project manager, Richmond District, graduated from the Virginia Army National Guard Officer's Candidate School in August. He was awarded the Leadership Excellence Award for making the top score in his class.

Guy Tyrrell, procurement officer, Staunton District, has received the Virginia contracting officer certification.

Brenda Waters, Bristol District public affairs manager, was recently honored by the Greater Tri-Cities Tennessee - Virginia Society of Professional Journalists with the "Golden Telephone Award" for her work with the media.

Joe Yates, Lebanon shop, Bristol District, has earned the North American Transportation Management Institute's supervisor certification.

Births to...

Scott Arey, transportation operator II, Mint Springs AHQ, Verona Residency, and his wife, Belinda, a daughter, Jacie Marie, born Sept. 11.

James Dick, transportation operation II, Christiansburg Residency, and his wife, Jessie, a son, James Derrick, born Sept. 8. Susan Jarrells, administrative office services specialist II, Christiansburg Residency, is the grandmother.

Salim Indorewala, engineer, Location and Design Section, Northern Virginia District, and his wife, Farrah, a daughter, Hennah, born May 27.

Steven Malcom, transportation operations manager I, Verona Residency, and wife, Kera, a son, Lane Christian, born July 28.

Ryan McLane, regional traffic operations manager, Staunton District, a son, Kurtis McLane, born Sept. 20.

Zamir Mirza, senior engineer, Location and Design Section, Northern Virginia District, and his wife, Bushra, a son, Musa Rayhan, born July 25.

Roger "Skip" Musser, engineering technician, Location and Design Section, Bristol District, and his wife, Michelle, a daughter, Marley Jane.

Barry Racer, trades technician, Culpeper District Office, and his wife, Lenora, a son, Gavin Wayne, born June 5.

Joey Watterson, Fairfield AHQ, Lexington Residency, and his wife, Tonya, a daughter, Charlie Danielle, born July 12.

Jim White, Lexington Residency administrator, a first grandchild, Sophia Abigail, born Sept. 13.



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Retirements

B. H. Beavers, arch.-enr. mgr. I, Northern Virginia District, 46 years of service.
George E. Brown, transportation operator, II, Salem District, 18 years of service.
L. F. Bryant Jr., operations manager I, Northern Virginia District, 37 years of service.
Ronald P. Bryant, engineering technician IV, Salem District, 42 years of service.
Robert O. Cassada, arch.-enr. mgr. II, Central Office, 39 years of service.
James C. Eure, engineering-technician III, Hampton Roads District, 41 years of service.
Roy J. Fincham, transportation operator II, Culpeper District, 24 years of service.
Oley L. Fleming, transportation operator II, Bristol District, 27 years of service.
Jones T. Glasscock, transportation operator II, Lynchburg District, 21 years of service.
William D. Hall, admin. and office spec. III, Salem District, 28 years of service.
Earnest Hardy Jr., compliance-safety officer III, Hampton Roads District, 7 years of service.
Harold R. Heath, transportation operations manager II, Hampton Roads, 36 years of service.
Walter R. Horton, transportation operations manager II, Salem District, 32 years of service.
Sandra A. Humphrey, gen. admin. supv. I-coord. I, Fredericksburg District, 32 years of service.
Beverly A. Hunt, prog. admin. mgr. I, Northern Virginia District, 30 years of service.
William F. Knick, engineering technician II, Staunton District, 33 years of service.
Donald E. Lewis, operations manager III, Salem District, 34 years of service.
Thomas A. Mayo, prog. admin. specialist II, Central Office, 33 years of service.
David L. McGhee, prog. admin. specialist II, Central Office, 31 years of service.
Gary M. Much, operations manager II, Northern Virginia District, 31 years of service.
W. D. Pierce, engineering technician III, Bristol District, 41 years of service.
Robert W. Saufley Jr., architect-engineer I, Staunton District, 35 years of service.
David A. Slagle, trades manager I, Richmond District, 21 years of service.
David M. Smith, procurement officer II, Central Office, 37 years of service.
Marion L. Smith, transportation operator II, Northern Virginia District, 5 years of service.
John T. Weary, transportation operator II, Richmond District, 13 years of service.
Ronald H. Wilkes, engineering technician III, Central Office, 43 years of service.
James C. Wills Jr., engineering technician III, Hampton Roads District, 23 years of service.



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Obituaries

Editor's Note: If you have a death in your work unit, or if you know of the death of a retiree, please notify the Bulletin editor. We particularly need to know about *retirees'* deaths because we are not notified of them by the retirement system. E-mail notices to the editor at **Chuck.Armstrong@VDOT.Virginia.gov** or write to The Editor, The Bulletin, Public Affairs Office, VDOT, 1401 E. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219.

Patton C. Adams, 83, construction inspector B, Chatham Residency, died Aug. 16; retired in 1980 with 33 years of service.

Timothy L. Baylets, 53, survey technician, Staunton District, died Aug. 14; he had seven years of service.

Harold M. Haynie, 57, watercraft operator, Lancaster County, died July 10; he had 27 years of service.

Paul E. Johnson, 81, equipment operator B, Lynchburg District, died Aug. 4; retired in 1990 with 38 years of service.

Roger Kennedy, 59, transportation operator II, Verona Residency, died Aug. 3; retired in 2005 with 19 years of service.

June Y. Ricketts, 73, executive secretary, Lynchburg District, died July 19; retired in 1991 with 37 years of service.

Lil Rittenhouse, 78, office services specialist, Administrative Services Division, died Aug. 2; retired in 1989 with 34 years of service.

George A. Scruggs, 44, transportation operator II, Chatham Residency, died July 2; he had 11 years of service.

Berlin G. Sine, 78, equipment operator, Edinburg Residency, died Aug. 14; retired in 1990 with 26 years of service.



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A 21st century VDOT

When a new commissioner arrives, the question on most everyone's mind is, "What's he thinking, and what is going to change that affects me?" In my career, I've certainly asked that question. So in this first column, I wanted to share some of my thoughts with you.

First, I wouldn't want to be any place right now other than here at VDOT.

As I begin my third week as commissioner, I'm becoming acquainted with your work, dedication and professionalism, and I am impressed. There is a tangible tradition of excellence residing in this department. It is well known and respected by transportation professionals across the country, and I am proud to be advocating for us in such an environment.



David S. Ekern. P.E.

Second, VDOT is emerging as a model for what transportation experts are calling the "21st Century DOT."

When it comes to performance management, we are on the forefront of setting standards for the nation. You have proven that the performance management system works--it's not theoretical. We are setting the bar for projects to be on time and on budget, as well as for other areas--and these standards are impressive. They are meaningful to citizens and legislators because they can see results. As Chief Deputy Commissioner Greg Whirley says, "What gets measured, gets done." It's exciting to think of other areas we will measure. This will be one of the focus areas we will continue. And we will focus on the quality of projects.

Another focus area already selected is systems operations. I have a long-term focus on operations and on using technology that makes the transportation system more efficient and safer.

Third, we are running a major complex business in VDOT. The General Assembly and the people of Virginia trust us with almost \$4 billion annually. We have an obligation to the commonwealth to produce results and show value with this money. That's where the VDOT business plan comes in. It is a strong plan, and it supports our drive to excellence.

Fourth, we are in a new century and a new and different era of transportation. Transportation systems are evolving quickly and in multimodal relationships.

Consequently, this will be a time for continuing what we're doing right and for seeing and doing new things. In that effort,

each of you brings resources to make progress happen. We have great opportunity to shape the future.

David S. Ekern

Commissioner

P.S. This column is one of the means we will use to discuss topics of importance to you. If you have ideas for topics or questions for future columns, please send them to the editor: Chuck.Armstrong@VDOT.Virginia.gov.



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Round trips better than straight trips, sometimes



Read about Virginia's oldest traffic circle, in Amherst >

Circular intersections, called "roundabouts," are gaining favor with VDOT engineers.

Such intersections, which were called "traffic circles" throughout much of the 20th century, fell into disuse in the United States in the 1950s. In Europe and other parts of the world, however, they were redesigned, renamed "roundabouts," and found to be very efficient traffic facilitators.

In the 1990s, roundabouts soared in popularity in the United States, where more than 1,000 have been built. This year alone, more than 300 will be constructed. In Virginia, nine roundabouts are open to traffic, and 25 additional ones have been approved by VDOT's roundabout committee.

Safety and efficiency increase dramatically with roundabouts. They reduce traffic delays, the number and severity of crashes, fuel consumption, air pollution, and construction and maintenance costs. They also can enhance the beauty of an intersection.

Best Practices: Roundabouts prove their efficiency

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reported in March 2000 that installation of roundabouts reduced crashes in these locations by 39 percent, injury crashes by 76 percent, and fatal and incapacitating crashes by 89 percent.

According to Walter Pribble, a senior planner in the Transportation and Mobility Planning Division, "The roundabout is the safest at-grade intersection possible." He adds that roundabouts are not appropriate for all allocations, but they "should be considered as one of our tools in the toolbox."

Frequently, when new roundabouts are proposed, the public is wary of them. However, after motorists use them, they are enthusiastic about their efficiency.

Virginia roundabouts open for traffic (not including subdivision roundabouts) are located at:

- Christopher Newport College, Newport News
- Routes 649/606 at the Charlottesville Airport off Route 29
- Wal-Mart/Home Depot, west of Route 17, Gloucester
- Virginia Tech Campus, Blacksburg
- Route 13, Powhatan Courthouse
- Virginia Union University (Lombardy Street), City of Richmond
- Route 645, Winchester Airport
- Routes 29Bus/60, Town of Amherst
- Routes 15/231/33, Town of Gordonsville

Read more about roundabouts at <http://www.vdot.virginia.gov/infoservice/faq-roundabouts.asp>



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Tech Bytes

Laptops have the answers

A lot of data has just become easily accessible for VDOT equipment technicians and construction inspectors through new laptops.

Photo by Trevor Wrayton



Technicians test diagnostic tool

Laptop computers are now in the laps of some VDOT equipment technicians and construction inspectors across the state, and a boost in productivity is expected in equipment repair bays and construction sites.

With their new diagnostic laptops are (from left) instructor Bill McGlinchey and equipment technicians Tony Hitt of Northern Virginia and Norman Docx of Richmond District.

Nine equipment technicians, one from each district, are among some of the first DOT technicians in the nation to begin putting away their hand-held diagnostic tools and replacing them with laptops. Only two other DOT fleets are moving in this direction, according to Erle Potter, VDOT's state equipment manager.

Technicians normally use an assortment of hand-held diagnostic tools specifically made for Ford, Chrysler, GM, Caterpillar, Cummins and other manufacturers--tools that need expensive annual updates. In the pilot, laptops are loaded with diagnostic software for much but not all of VDOT's equipment. This includes generic programs such as one for light-duty vehicles and specific manufacturers' software for some heavy equipment. If the pilot is successful, more diagnostic software will be added in the future.

After the laptop is connected to a vehicle's computer, it gives technicians data on various vehicle operating parameters and electronic fault codes for malfunctions, as well as information about repairing it. In some cases, the software enables technicians to do things that the dealership once had to do -- such as modifying the "shift points," speeds at which automatic transmissions change gears. This is often necessary when a truck is reassigned from a work unit in flat terrain to one in the mountains.

The vendor has had difficulty providing some software required by the contract in this pilot. However, if the glitches are solved, VDOT technicians might be able to forget about updating manufacturers' diagnostics, or hunting for them around their shops. They also will have a versatile tool that can save them time and VDOT money in diagnosing equipment.

Project inspectors have data at fingertips

Meanwhile, a fast-growing number of construction inspectors are using laptops to place at their finger tips almost any data they need for a construction project. This program is called the Project Record Keeping System (PRKS), and it was developed by VDOT inspectors and a consultant firm supplying inspectors for VDOT projects.

While working in a field office or in a truck on site at a project, an inspector can slip a PRKS disk into a laptop and view the inspection and construction manuals, specification book, materials book, Roads and Bridge Standards, contractor's schedule, daily project activities journal, project correspondence and much more. In the past, inspectors had to leave the inspection activity and go back to the field office for reference manuals.

The laptop, which carries a flash card and a wireless card, can be plugged into the cigarette lighter in the inspector's truck or into a receptacle in the field office. Inspectors also connect to PRKS from the jobsite via wireless internet.

The innovation began two years ago, when Cher Gomilla-Kennedy, a veteran construction manager and trainer in Northern Virginia District, saw the need to develop a paper filing system for consistent record-keeping on all projects. It was a great help in organizing inspectors' work. Subsequently, Alan Saunders, the project controls engineer in Richmond District until a recent transfer to the Innovative Project Delivery Division, saw the need to convert the new filing system into an electronic file cabinet with diary templates, example spreadsheets and electronic forms.

At Saunders' request, VDOT consultant McDonald, Boyard and Peck pulled some of its own and VDOT's inspectors together to develop the system, and they did it for inspectors at varying levels of computer proficiency. Billy Wright, Richmond District's quality assurance manager, supported the consultant's development efforts. VDOT's Knowledge Management Office and Northern Virginia and Richmond districts provided some funding, and the consultant absorbed the rest of the costs. PRKS is repaying them with higher-quality inspections.

Inspectors have learned that with this program they can quickly find solutions to project problems. They also can upload templates that show exactly what is expected of contractors as they proceed with construction. "It's a simple tool with a lot of information in one place," says Saunders. "I'm just very happy that it's working for both inspector trainees and long-term veteran inspectors alike."



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Answer File

Their careers and the interstate began together

QUESTION: Four VDOT employees began work with the department in 1956, the year the U.S. interstate highway system was begun. Who are these veterans with 50 years of service?

ANSWER: VDOT veterans reaching their golden year of service are P. J. Fowler, right of way specialist senior, Hampton Roads District; Gene Hull, deputy district administrator, Northern Virginia District; Harry Lee, construction engineer, Fredericksburg District; and Earl Robb, division administrator, Environmental Division (not featured). Here are a few of their memories.

P. J. FOWLER joined the department after a four-year hitch in the Air Force, beginning in the Materials Section. He transferred to the Right of Way Section after about 18 months and has been there since. He recalls one incident which made him wonder, momentarily, if he should stay in right of way:

"I was working with a landowner who was upset over a partial acquisition of his property several years earlier. During the course of our conversation, he jumped up from the chair and said that he was going to look for his gun so that he could kill himself. At this point, my thoughts were that if he wanted to kill himself, he probably would take me with him.

"After a while his work crew came in and he calmed down. We discussed the matter further and we reached an agreement. I found out later that his wife, who was not there at the time, had hidden the gun. As a matter of information, I was a lot younger when this happened."

GENE HULL started in the Monterey Area Headquarters placing mix-in-place macadam on roads in Highland County and being introduced to snow removal operations. Things were "quite different" then, Hull remembers. "We placed abrasives and chemicals by hand from the back of a dump truck."

Hull also remembers the blizzard of 1966. "We were required to work long shifts, some as long as 36 hours, for a three-week period. You can probably guess what the stress level was by the time that all of the roads were open. Many of the roads in Loudoun County were not passable for three weeks, and some of



Fowler

the citizens had to have food delivered by helicopters."

Asked about his most satisfying achievement, he answered "working on construction projects." The one he most enjoyed was the "Mixing Bowl" project on I-95 (later I-395) at the Pentagon. "This was the most expensive interstate project--\$53 million--ever awarded in the state in 1970, and it was completed within the time limit."

HARRY LEE began his career in the drafting room as an engineering draftsman aide, which he said was the "lowest position on the scale for this type of work." For the first two or three months he was assigned "drudgery jobs working on cross sections, a mind-numbing and tedious job. I was really happy when computers came along and took over these boring tasks."

Asked for his most satisfying accomplishment, Lee said it would be the completion of the VDOT Workers' Memorial. He called it "an amazing effort by a very large number of employees," and in addition, he is very proud that his daughter designed it and that "it will stand as a testimony to her talents for decades to come."

Asked if there was anything he would rather not do again, Lee said, "I don't think I would undo anything, as each bump was a learning experience that made the next problem a little easier to solve."



Lee



Hull



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Humor--It's always close to the centerline (the heart) of VDOT

A very short ride on this pony!

Here's a story from Marshall Funk, maintenance operations manager, Wytheville Residency. He says it happened in the mid-1970s. He does not identify "Joe" in the story.

"The crew I was working with this hot mid-summer day was patching along a rural road in Grayson County. As lunchtime approached, and as was the custom, we located a luscious lawn with a huge spreading maple tree close to the road. These were the favorite locations to have lunch and gain some relief from the heat.

"While we were having lunch, a small boy of about 12 came out of the house, offered cold water to drink and joined in the conversation. There was a small pony just across the fence, and this creature appeared to be very friendly--and hungry for attention. After lunch, we walked over to the animal and began picking grass to feed it. One of the crew asked the young man if the pony was his. He answered with an enthusiastic 'Yes sir.' With this, Joe crossed the fence and began petting the creature, which seemed to enjoy the affection abundantly.

"After such a friendly welcome, Joe asked the young fellow if he could ride the pony. The boy again answered immediately with a resounding 'Yes sir.' Joe then stepped across the small pony and began to rest his weight on the animal's back. The pony took one look at him through the corner of his eye and gave a huge lunge, with a back thrust that deposited Joe's backside firmly on the cool ground under the maple tree. With this, the boy said, 'I didn't say how long.'"